

# Education Reforms and Capitalism's Changes to Work

January 23, 2022



In this article, which is the first chapter of my new book, I examine what has occurred in and to education and teachers' work since publication of *The Future of Our Schools: Teachers Unions and Social Justice* (Haymarket, 2012).<sup>1</sup> I had intended to revise that book in 2017, in response to Trump's election, but the pandemic changed my plan. Seeing the media whip up public hysteria about teachers and teachers unions; investigating information technology's changes to work and education; examining reports of world financial organizations; and looking at how the neoliberal narrative had changed in response to new social movements, in particular Black Lives Matter, I concluded we faced a significant shift: Capitalism had been altering work and education in ways most opponents of its reforms, myself included, had missed.

In a nutshell, the ruling class used the pandemic to accelerate and intensify changes so substantial that what has occurred should be understood as a new iteration of the neoliberal project in education. The process, underway for several years, reflects and reinforces changes in work and the global economy. Public education is being reconfigured with "new models of curriculum provision based on digital resource banks created by a variety of commercial organizations, politically-connected entrepreneurs, teacher-creators, public and charitable institutions, ... increased commercial penetration into state schooling through a mixed economy of new providers and public/private partnerships," creating a new infrastructure of education that is intended to persist well beyond the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

I make the case that we arrive late in contesting this new project, outlining its origins and social, political, and economic ramifications, and I explain that we have time, still, to resist successfully. The popular slogan "When we fight, we win" inspires militancy, the bottom line for victory. We also need to fight *smart* to win, which requires examining the new project, our victories, and our mistakes with all the objectivity we can muster. Our opponents bring to bear almost unimaginable wealth, power over governments, control of media, and armies. We bring the power of our numbers and ideas and the passion and courage of multigenerational, multiracial movements that are defending our planet, our livelihoods, social justice, democracy, and the peaceful future humanity deserves.

To protect education as a public good, we need to ground our analysis and strategies in forthright acknowledgment that the system was, from its inception, structurally and ideologically flawed. There is no “golden age” to which we can return. Struggles contesting the shortcomings in public schools that are rooted in historic injustices can guide our vision about the schools we want and in turn inform further resistance. Fighting smart also requires marshaling all of our resources, which includes the left and potential allies in the labor movement, beyond those involved personally in education.

This new iteration of the neoliberal project has already manifested itself globally in teachers’ work and public education, from preschool through mass public higher education. No student is too young or too old for education to be “data-driven,” with metrics for teaching and learning decided far from classrooms. As my analysis of global education reform has been dismissed as a “conspiracy theory” by some opponents of privatization, I note that conspiracies are, by definition, secret. This project’s aims and methods are public, articulated in reports of world financial institutions, in particular the World Bank’s *World Development Reports* of the past five years, as well as in materials produced by think tanks and foundations funded by billionaires, primarily those whose wealth is based on finance and information technology. Often the project’s aims are couched in rhetoric that makes the ideas seem unobjectionable and their financial and political backing irrelevant. For instance, the self-identified think tank for the “New Democrats,” the Clinton wing of the Democratic Party, with offices in Washington DC and Brussels, has named itself the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI) and identifies its goals as “radically pragmatic.” One ominous indication of our opponents’ sense of their strength is that they explicitly name their ideological and political commitments: A blog in February 2020 proudly explained that the PPI now formally sponsors “the neoliberal project,” embracing ideas and activities ongoing since 2017.<sup>3</sup>

### **Education and Teachers’ Work: Why Do They Matter?**

Examining teachers’ work and labor activism, as well as educational research that looks at education’s functioning under capitalism, can inform struggles against capitalism, encompassing forms of social oppression that have been “baked into” its development.<sup>4</sup> Teachers’ location and function as “idea workers” who do “women’s work,” in the last standing sector of public service that has not yet been fully privatized, one that is still understood as legitimately subject to democratic control, makes their work unique and their activism especially generative of lessons for labor. Because teachers’ work takes place at the juncture of capitalism’s economic, social, political, and cultural processes, looking closely at what occurs in teachers unions can illuminate how to better negotiate tensions and develop synergies that address labor’s responsibility to defend the dignity of work and workers’ economic self-interest, as well as its political and economic responsibilities and capacity to advance goals of movements for social justice, democracy, and peace.

School reforms initiated by those with the most power and money reflect how they want society to look, just as do struggles that contest their vision and plans. Yet what occurs in classrooms is not the only, nor arguably the most influential, education that occurs in capitalism. Social movements teach by exposing harmful cultural and ideological assumptions; as John Dewey observed, learning occurs in families, and parents can be thought of as our first teachers; popular culture influences the way we speak, dress, eat, and think; we learn about class relations—class struggle—in the workplace.<sup>5</sup> While education does not take place only in schools, they are sites of intense political controversy concerning explicit requirements about what to teach as well as the “hidden curriculum.” “Government schools,” as the far-right labels public education, are still a space for democratic struggle, seen in contestations about requirements for ethnic studies, the rights of transgender young people in physical accommodations, and opposition to standardized testing, before and during the pandemic. On the other side, the right has used its wealth and power to attack academic

freedom in higher education and in pre-K-12 education and to criminalize teaching about climate change and systemic racism. The frenzied caricature of critical race theory, used to turn back gains by the powerful movement for racial equality, shows that schooling is a site of ideological struggle about political and social challenges to the status quo.

The less publicized struggles over how and whether students should be placed in “ability groups” or “school tracks” reveal the deep, historic contradictions of capitalist society’s claims to be meritocratic and democratic. Standardized measurements of “ability,” far from being objective, reflect and reinforce social inequalities rooted in social class, family history of formal education, gender, supposed mastery of English, physical disabilities, and how U.S. society constructs “race.”<sup>6</sup> The way we think about and measure “ability” exposes not only how schools synchronize education to the economy but also how categories of student “ability” relate to war and foreign policy. “Learning disabilities,” for example, developed as a classification of “ability” in the context of the Russians’ launch of Sputnik. Bipartisan horror that the United States was losing the Cold War because of its inferior schools drove policies to make children master more advanced material at younger ages. The assumption that Black people and immigrants couldn’t handle more challenging academic work due to biological or cultural deficits, embedded in mass public education from its creation, rationalized school “failure” of students from these groups. But when white children, mostly boys, couldn’t handle schooling’s new academic demands, a medicalized explanation for their problem mastering school work emerged—learning disabilities.<sup>7</sup>

Educational research clarifies our challenge, which is not *whether* schools disrupt or reproduce unequal social relations but *how* they do so and *for whom*, by mapping how these conditions relate to inequalities outside the school walls. The significant impact of Black educational researchers, whose presence reflects the long-standing respect for teachers and teaching in the Black community from slavery onward, itself refutes the persistent canard that academic success is a function of biology or culture.<sup>8</sup> This body of educational research also challenges deterministic analyses on the left contending schools reproduce a status quo of inequality uniformly, as was the intention in creating mass public education.

One contribution I hope this forthcoming book makes is to push analysts of labor economy to take into account how social oppression, including gender and sexuality, configure work and the workplace. The best example of the left’s lacunae in this regard is its failure to recognize that teaching is real work and that teachers are workers.<sup>9</sup> So much still written by the left about labor and unions perpetuates a historically inaccurate nostalgia for a working class of heterosexual, cis-gender, white men. The mischaracterization of teachers’ work reflects the bromance that obscures complexities about how and why workers organize on the job and undercuts our seeing and learning from contemporary struggles. We can take pride in, and learn from, the history of Black women, working as teachers, excluded from white professional associations and segregated teachers unions, who formed independent associations as teachers to protect their working conditions and conditions for Black students. Moreover, analysis of who comprises the working class that marginalizes teachers simultaneously obscures workers’ struggles powered by resistance to discrimination in the workplace. Gay women who fought their exclusion from the overwhelmingly white, male building trades unions, and gay militants in the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union, fought for their rights alongside campaigns against exclusionary racial policies in their unions, connecting both to red-baiting. They have much to teach us about building solidarity from below.<sup>10</sup>

### **Recovering Lost Time and Territory**

While we focused on resisting Trump’s and the GOP’s horrifying advocacy of racial superiority, theocracy, subversion of women’s rights, anti-immigrant sentiment, dehumanization of people with disabilities, anti-labor positions, and more, policies that signaled and comprised the new iteration of

the neoliberal project in education were underway. Resisting the DeVos/Trump/GOP expansion of policies prominent in the bipartisan project enacted under Bush and Obama, in particular standardized testing, charter schools, and vouchers, as well as the GOP's neo-conservative additions, like funding for religious schools, occupied the movement's resources and attention. During this time, education activists overlooked the significance of the Senate's unanimous approval of Trump's nominee for assistant secretary of education for career, technical, and adult education, Scott Stump. Every GOP and Democratic Senator voting on Stump's nomination—even Sanders—cast an approving ballot.<sup>11</sup> Stump's background in workforce development and education in community colleges using online learning reflects the World Bank's push that workers' access to online learning through digital platforms is essential to reduce poverty. An underlying assumption, unchallenged by those who advance this project, including the two U.S. teacher federations, the AFT (American Federation of Teachers) and NEA (National Education Association), is that powerful elites and the politicians they control have the right to determine the future of education.

The breathtaking scope of change being planned and enacted in teachers' work and new forms of privatization are occurring on a scale hard to grasp, let alone resist. Mining student data yields enormous profits, and school districts have few, if any, safeguards to keep student data private. Data collected on students isn't anonymous, as platforms and software companies claim, because tech companies can and do re-personalize it. Student and teacher privacy rights are easily voided when software for remote learning contains video. Teachers and students are subjected to surveillance of their physical presence and behavior. One of the most chilling aspects of the new project is how it extends corporate control and profit throughout the entire range of social services.<sup>12</sup> A virtually unrecognized paradox of teachers unions demanding remote learning to keep children, families, communities, and school workers safe (as they had to do) is that teachers have been training their replacement, AI, with each key stroke of online assignments. One immediate and straightforward ask of teachers unions is for school districts to address the dangers that the National Educational Policy Center, or NEPC, has identified in "personalized learning," digital platforms, and proprietary software. While understanding the life-and-death imperatives that drove teacher union demands for remote learning, we also need to explore why they missed this big picture.

Another more complicated, worrisome issue is the extent to which the ruling class has—again—successfully obscured its aims with rhetorical and financial support for social justice struggles, especially anti-racism. The extent of nonprofit, foundation, university, and liberal think tank entanglement in education-based anti-racist organizations funded by Silicon Valley and Wall Street is itself a topic for a book.<sup>13</sup> Often truly progressive organizing by NGOs contradicts their funders' aims. For example, cutting-edge organizing against ed-tech surveillance that reinforces the school-to-prison pipeline is being done by the Alliance for Educational Justice. This authentically grassroots group is funded by the Democracy Alliance (DA), which includes Mary Kay Henry, president of the Service Employees International Union; a coterie of wealthy liberals, many of them ed-tech entrepreneurs; and the Center for American Progress (CAP), a think tank bankrolled by supporters of the Clinton wing of the Democratic Party. DA members pay annual dues of \$30,000 and are required to contribute a total of at least \$200,000 a year to recommended groups. Although DA steers money to "pillars of the political left such as the conservative media watchdog Media Matters," it also donates big money to CAP and the data firm Catalist, run by Clinton allies. CAP explicitly supports most aspects of the Bush, Clinton, and Obama educational reforms, including expansion of charter schools.<sup>14</sup>

The breathtaking shift in media treatment of teachers—pervasive claims that fighting the dangers of in-person learning undercut the well-being of low-income children, families, and communities—reproduces the narrative we have heard under Democratic and Republican administrations since Bush. The vicious onslaught in the media and among politicians occurs now for

the same reason it was orchestrated 15 years ago: Teachers organized as workers are a powerful force, and their unions are a stable, potentially formidable foe. Hence the narrative about selfish teachers is a backhanded compliment to us—a response to victories in teachers’ labor activism in the past decade, in “blue cities” and “red state” walkouts, as well as gains in educating teachers and parents about the purposes of and harm done by standardized testing under No Child Left Behind.

Activists have changed teachers unions, generating enthusiasm and excitement about possibilities for labor to challenge the status quo. The movement has demonstrated that teachers are a force with which powerful elites must reckon and that “business unionism” is not the only or best way to defend teachers as workers and public education as a system. Teacher union activists have shown we can both protect education workers’ dignity and many of the needs of the communities and children we serve. The burgeoning support for teacher unionism that advances social justice as a core principle has made both NEA and AFT alter their rhetoric and, in some cases, their policies. The movement’s exciting growth has shown what teachers’ labor activism can accomplish.<sup>15</sup>

When Mary Compton and I edited *The Global Assault on Teaching, Teachers, and Their Unions* (Palgrave, 2008), we addressed a burgeoning young movement, which has flourished in ways we could not predict. I assume readers have a general familiarity with the ideas Mary and I laid out, which I don’t summarize in this book.<sup>16</sup> Mary and I decided not to name capitalism because we wanted our arguments to be persuasive to education activists who did not self-identify as anti-capitalist. But a new generation has been radicalized in the United States, and talk of capitalism—and socialism—is now widespread among opponents of the status quo. Thus, this new book names capitalism and explores the implications of understanding it as a social system.

Education workers who are labor activists often have at least three jobs: their work in the school, their labor activity, and union reform. Participation in movements for social justice and family responsibilities make their schedules impossibly taxing. To address this reality, I again write informally, in first person, minimizing jargon. I make statements that are bolder than I would in an academic article because I try to duplicate what readers say was most useful in my earlier work: creation of a narrative that expressed ideas they intuited and felt and yet couldn’t synthesize. To make this book more useful as research, I include extensive narrative endnotes, a format I have learned was used by the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) in its pamphlets for workers. (Reading the text straight through, without looking at the end notes, may help you to more easily follow the thread of the argument.) Whenever possible I cite references that are open-access, often with pdfs on Google Scholar. The notes are suggestive, not comprehensive, and I apologize to the many scholars and activists who have informed my thinking, in publications and private conversations, but whom I don’t cite. I continue to learn so much from education workers and the scholar-activists supporting the movement, and I acknowledge that debt and thank you.

Using an idea from a young comrade more knowledgeable than I about synergies between print publication and social media and the changing left landscape, I am publishing this book by an untraditional method. Organizations and publications sympathetic to the book’s purpose will publish the chapters serially. The left website *Tempest* will publish the second chapter online. An online public event will follow publication of each chapter, in sessions that I hope will model what we know from educational research about encouraging construction of knowledge to support organizing and political education.<sup>17</sup>

In concluding this first chapter, I note parallels between the system of mass public education when it was newly created a century ago, as a response to social upheaval during the industrial revolution, and our challenge today.<sup>18</sup> Though her language differs from mine, Margaret Haley, a socialist and suffragist, and founding organizer of the first U.S. teachers union affiliated with organized labor, sums up many of this book’s premises. Haley organized a union of elementary school teachers—all

women—in Chicago, the first in the AFT, which is why the Chicago Teachers Union is Local 1. In what is probably her most famous speech, “Why Teachers Should Organize,” which she gave in 1904 to the NEA, at that time a professional organization of school administrators, she articulates her vision as a teacher and union organizer of why teachers’ work is unique:

If there is one body of public servants of whom the public has a right to expect the mental and moral equipment to face the labor question and other issues vitally affecting the welfare of society and urgently pressing for a rational and scientific solution, it is the public school teachers whose special contribution to society is their own power to think, the moral courage to follow their convictions, and the training of citizens to think and to express thought in free and intelligent action.

Haley then described the reciprocity of teachers’ work with labor struggles and the urgency of recognizing how both relate to the fate of democracy:

How shall the public school and the industrial workers in their struggle to secure the rights of humanity through a more just and equitable distribution of the products of their labor, meet their mutual responsibility to each other and to society? ... The essential thing is that the public school teachers recognize the fact that their struggle to maintain the efficiency of the schools through better conditions for themselves is a part of the same great struggle which the manual workers—often misunderstood and unaided—have been making for humanity through their efforts to secure living conditions for themselves and their children; and that [behind] the unfavorable conditions of both is a common cause.

The “common cause” of attacks on public education, teaching, and conditions of work is capitalism, which subordinates workers’ rights to profit. And, as she observes at the end of her speech, the struggle for control over work and uses of technology cannot be separated from the fight for democracy, at the workplace and in society:

Two ideals are struggling for supremacy in American life today: one, the industrial ideal dominating through the supremacy of commercialism, which subordinates the worker to the product and the machine; the other, the ideal of democracy, the ideal of the educators, which places humanity above all machines and demands that all activity shall be the expression of life. If this ideal of the educators cannot be carried over into the industrial field then the ideal of industrialism will be carried over into the school. Those two ideals can no more continue to exist in American life than our nation could have continued half slave and half free. If the school cannot bring joy to the work of the world, the joy must go out of its own life, and work in the school, as in the industrial field, will become drudgery.

For much of my life, Haley’s assumptions that teachers are workers and analysis of their work is central to understanding what occurs in capitalism have been marginal in the academy and the left.<sup>19</sup> We owe a debt to Haley and to the movement that has demonstrated her ideas are as relevant today as they were a century ago.

In the next chapter, I explore how understanding capitalism as a social system helps to clarify linkages between social movements fighting for justice, equality, democracy, and peace and labor’s responsibilities to those struggles. I take a deep dive into material about alterations that information technology has made to knowledge and cultural work and combine insights from this body of work to theories of social reproduction. *New Politics* will host a webinar shortly after publication of this first chapter. Details to be announced. [Editor’s note: *The webinar, organized as a Zoom roundtable, can now be viewed here:* <https://www.facebook.com/newpoliticsmag/videos/263390032588738/>

## notes

1. On methodology: The findings supporting claims in this book come from a meta-analysis of relevant scholarship. My assumptions are explicit and frame my questions, while being kept separate from my analysis, which I strive to make objective. I read, synthesize, and apply scholarship from several disciplines, looking for overlaps, omissions, and contradictions. After doing a preliminary dive into material to crystallize a hypothesis, I try to locate relevant material research that supports, complicates, and contradicts the patterns I've identified. My ideas come from published scholarship as well as webinars, podcasts, and conversations with activists. The advantage of the meta-analysis is that it enables one to examine a huge scope of material, making connections that are missed in the silo-ization of disciplinary knowledge, academic departments, and the tendency toward single-issue-ism of social movements. A disadvantage of this methodology is that I may connect the dots incorrectly, so the pattern and picture aren't accurate. To address this limitation, I use an iterative process, revising ideas against new material I read, looking especially for empirical evidence or theories that contradict my hypothesis or conclusions.

2. Ben Williamson and Anna Hogan, *Commercialisation and Privatisation in/of Education in the Context of Covid-19* (Education International, July 2020), 28. This report documents the global nature of the project and its acceleration during the pandemic. In "Pearson 2025: Transforming teaching and privatising education data" (2019), Sam Sellar and Anna Hogan describe why privatization of data is a source of huge profits and detail Pearson's global ambitions.

3. Colin Mortimer, "A New Chapter: the Neoliberal Project Joins PPI." Feb. 10, 2020. The PPI created a Center for New Liberalism six months after The Neoliberal Project. The Neoliberal Project boasts that it has "40 chapters around the world, a podcast listened to over 300,000 times and a social media reach of over 15 million impressions a month."

4. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis's *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life* (1976) made the important case about schooling's function in reproducing capitalist economic relations. Yet it flattened processes educational researchers have found when looking inside schools. Consider Jean Anyon's work, written at about the same time, "Social class and school knowledge" in *Curriculum inquiry* (11, no. 1, 1981), 3-42; and "Social class and the hidden curriculum of work" in the *Journal of Education* (reprinted in *Childhood socialization* (Routledge, 2017), 369-94. Anyon used Bowles and Gintis but also Bourdieu and provided empirical evidence of how social reproduction occurs in classrooms. Pauline Lipman's research about Chicago is a more contemporary corrective to Bowles and Gintis, critically examining school reforms under neoliberalism from the micro (how schools are organized, funded, and closed) to the macro (capitalism globally), integrating race and social class. Her book *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race, and the right to the city* (Routledge, 2013) is a classic worth reading. However, a strong article, available online, that sets out her ideas is "Contesting the city: Neoliberal urbanism and the cultural politics of education reform in Chicago," *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education* (32.2, 2011), 217-34.

5. Powerful transmission of values and beliefs occurs outside of schools, and my focus on schools should not be construed as diminishing influences of other ways we learn about who we are—or should be—as a society. Religious institutions, media, and popular culture shape our views of ourselves and the world, as the body of research produced in critical cultural studies has documented and explained.

6. School desegregation often identified Hispanics as white, creating from the start "majority minority" schools that were classified as desegregated. I learned a great deal from Reynaldo A. Contreras and Leonard A. Valverde, "The impact of Brown on the education of Latinos," *The Journal*

of *Negro Education* (63.3, 1994), 470-81, about the history of school segregation of Latinos and their resistance. There is too much valuable research about how construction of race as a Black/white binary affected education of Hispanics for me to discuss. However, one aspect of debates about bilingual education that has been ignored is how many Hispanic immigrants speak an indigenous language as their first language and Spanish as their second, an important issue in learning another language. Angela Valenzuela's work about the ways in which teaching English language learners can be additive or subtractive complements other work that exposes how "deficit paradigms" drive school reforms that claim to promote equal educational opportunity. A book chapter summarizing Valenzuela's ideas is available in pdf: "Subtractive schooling, caring relations, and social capital in the schooling of U.S.-Mexican youth," *Beyond Silenced Voices: Class, Race, and Gender in United States Schools* (SUNY Press, 2005), 83-94.

7. See Wayne Au's "Meritocracy 2.0: High-stakes, standardized testing as a racial project of neoliberal multiculturalism," *Educational Policy* (30.1, 2016), 39-62 (available on Researchgate) to understand why education activists were aghast when *Jacobin* printed an article defending use of the SATs for college admission. Left readers are probably aware that countless studies have shown the ways "gifted and talented" programs sift students based on social class and parents' level of formal education, as well as parent networks. They may be interested in research about reforming schools to provide all students, including those considered "at risk" of school failure, code for low-income children of color, to the kinds of curriculum and teaching reserved for "gifted and talented" students. See Henry Levin and Wendy S. Hopfenberg, *Accelerated Schools for At-Risk Students* (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1988). Christine Sleeter contextualizes emergence of "learning disabilities" in "Why is there learning disabilities? A critical analysis of the birth of the field in its social context," *Disability Studies Quarterly* (30.2, 2010). Early, deep links between the military, education reform, and technology, are explored in Douglas D. Noble's pioneering work, *The classroom arsenal: Military research, information technology and public education*, originally published in 1991, reissued by Routledge, 2017. It is available only in book form, to my knowledge. Kenneth Saltman and David A. Gabbard look at newer connections between militarization of school life and corporatization post-9/11 in *Education as enforcement: The militarization and corporatization of schools* (Routledge, 2003). The introduction is available [here](#).

8. Alas, much scholarship by researchers of color that has informed my thinking is only available to those with access to university research libraries. One such author is Michèle Foster, whose early empirical work on the experiences of Black teachers, and how they and parents understand good teaching, still resonates. The "Brown Lectures" of the American Educational Research Association, which are available as webcasts, are useful snapshots of some of the best critical research on race and racism in education. The lectures skew older because the Brown Lecture recognizes lifetime achievement. Critical race theory also includes scholarship on indigenous peoples and linguistic minorities, in particular this nation's largest group of English-language learners - Hispanics. Lectures by Vanessa Siddle Walker, Prudence Carter, James Anderson, Richard Milner, Luis Moll, and Gloria Ladson Billings are [here](#).

9. One of the most comprehensive examinations of teaching as work was conducted by a collective of radical teachers, the Boston Women Teachers' Group, in the late 1970s. See Sara Freedman, Jane Jackson, and Katherine Boles, *The Effects of the Institutional Structure of Schools on Teachers* (1982). Studies by Sari Biklen, Sandra Acker, Raewyn Connell, and Diane Reay are important exceptions to the tendency of feminist scholarship to ignore teachers' work as a labor process. In "Class work: Mothers' involvement in their children's primary schooling" (1998), Reay skewers romanticized notions of "partnership" between mothers and teachers, examining racial and class stratification as reflected in mothers' material and cultural resources. Reay, along with a few others, mostly British, Australian, and Canadian feminist researchers in education, anticipate new work in



social reproduction by explaining that labor-market definitions of work and social class that are static neglect the key role of women in class formation. As Reay puts it, “Individuals do not occupy a location, they act in situations” (Reay, 23). Chloe Asselin and I analyze evidence about the absence of attention to teachers’ work and unions across the academy in “Learning from Lacunae in Research: Making Sense of Teachers’ Labor Activism,” available open access from Hipatia Press. In “Research on Teachers’ Labor Activism and Teachers Unions: Implications for Educational Policy, Scholarship, and Activism,” Chloe Asselin, Leah Z. Owens, Erin Dyke, Keith E. Benson, and I explore theories that explain social oppression in capitalism understood as a social system. We draw on research on four topics: Black teachers organizations; social movement unionism outside the United States; gender and sexuality; and the “red state” teacher walkouts, applying various theories that explain social oppression. The manuscript, which has been solicited for a publication of the American Educational Research Association, is a work in progress, available on Academia. We invite comments.

10. See Miriam Frank’s article “Hard Hats and Homophobia” in *New Labor Forum* (Spring/Summer 2001), available from JSTOR. “We Took Care of Each Other” by Jonathan Kissam, June 23, 2021.

11. Stump’s history, summarized in his official biography, illustrates one of the ideological tenets of the new iteration of the neoliberal project in education, “workforce development” through online programs, because education can and should mitigate the contour of the labor market. I explore how Sanders’ program for education reflected this dangerous idea in my *Jacobin* article (June 2019). I explore the rationale more fully, analyzing the role of the AFT and NEA, in Chapter 2, forthcoming in *Tempest*.

12. NEPC’s materials, available from its website include useful advice on adopting software and digital platforms as well as close examinations of how ed-tech is privatizing education. One especially useful report by Faith Boninger, Alex Molnar, and Michael K. Barbour (2020) is on Summit Learning: “Big Claims, Little Evidence, Lots of Money: The Reality Behind the Summit Learning Program and the Push to Adopt Digital Personalized Learning Platforms.” Summit is used very widely, including by school districts in which social justice reformers lead their locals. See also “Investing for ‘impact’ or investing for profit? Social impact bonds, Pay for Success, and the next wave of privatization of social services.” An NEPC interview with Ben Williamson explains why the looming use of AI in teaching should concern us all.

13. The easiest way to find these interlocks is to use “Little Sis” (the opposite of Big Brother), a project of the Public Accountability Initiative. However, in doing research for this chapter I saw the need for information to be updated. I hope readers will volunteer time, money, or both. More about Little Sis here: [littlesis.org/about](http://littlesis.org/about).

14. See Neil Campbell’s lament that teacher walkouts have linked poor pay and teaching conditions to public money being siphoned off to charter schools.

15. The left and educational researchers have responded to teachers’ militancy and the burgeoning of “social justice unionism” in teacher union reform efforts with a valuable uptick of research, from which we have much to learn. I try to build on what I’ve read, watched, and heard in popular publications of the left and in educational and labor studies journals to make connections as yet unmade. I wish space and time allowed me to synthesize what we can learn from this new body of knowledge but my focus—and contribution—is explaining the terrain of our battlefield, to conceptualize how teachers’ activism as workers illuminates what’s needed to build more dynamic yet stable movements, including labor, to challenge capitalism’s ideological dominance and the social, political, and economic status quo.

16. Mary created and maintained a website until her death a few years ago. Though new material is not being added, the site remains as an archive of research and news reports about global struggles to defend public education and teaching. She would have contributed knowledge and insights to this book about the global context, in particular what is happening in the global South, that I cannot. However, I do examine the role of Education International, the international confederation of teachers unions, in another chapter.

17. Later in the book, I suggest how to tap what we know from teaching, an under-utilized resource on the left. One example is how we organize discussions, or rather, depend on lecture and serial comments in which speakers do not engage with each other's ideas. Much of what we know about supporting use of language to deepen learning and democratize access to creating shared understandings was produced by critical researchers who investigated how to alter classroom environments to make learning both richer and more democratic. The classic work is Courtney Cazden's *Classroom Discourse: The Language of Teaching and Learning* (1988). Not coincidentally, Cazden and a group of like-minded scholars were pioneers in examining alterations made by the use of computers in classrooms, questioning who decides on their use. See Sarah Michaels, Courtney Cazden, and Bertram Bruce, "Whose Computer Is it, Anyway? Schools Embrace Computers Without Knowing Why." Originally published in "Science for the People" in a special section in 1985 on computers in education, this article is now available open-access in pdf in several places.

18. Although historians of education have written so much that illuminates aspects of how public education became what it is, I think David Tyack's "The One Best System" (1974) is unsurpassed as a readable, comprehensive, compelling history. It is still in print, available for purchase.

19. Haley's speech, "Why Teachers Should Organize," was published in the *Journal of Education* and is available at JSTOR open access. My analysis of Haley's speech, "Teachers, Unions, and School Reform: Examining Margaret Haley's Vision," published in *Educational Foundations* (1996) is now available on Academia. When I submitted the article on Haley's speech to an educational journal, one of the editors, a prominent radical education activist and critical scholar, wrote to me privately that it was clear teachers unions had no progressive potential. The quote from Dennis Carlson that opens the 1996 article describes and explains the anti-teacher union sentiment that permeated much educational research. An absolutely essential corrective to my piece as well as much scholarship on the early days of teachers unionism is Kate Rousmaniere's article "White Silence: A Racial Biography of Margaret Haley," *Equity and excellence in education* (34.2, 2001), 7-15. Rousmaniere describes what Haley and the union she organized failed to see or address: segregation of the Chicago schools and its teaching force, which resulted in an intensified exploitation of Black teachers. Unfortunately, to my knowledge Rousmaniere's article has not (yet) been made open-access.